

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
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R 121130Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7111
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USMISSION USUN NY
CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 0502

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MI
SUBJECT: EX-SAHARA: CONTINUING POLISARIO ATTACKS IN CENTRAL
MAURITANIA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 247

1. ON MARCH 6 AND 7 SIZABLE POLISARIO GUERRILLA FORCE ATTACKED
TICHIT (1828N 0930W), A SMALL CITY IN CENTRAL MAURITANIA SI-
TUATED SOME 600 KILOMETERS NORTHEAST OF NOUAKCHOTT AND ALMOST
DUE EAST OF TIDJIDJKA (1833N 1125W). ACCORDING TO LOCAL SPANISH
AND FRENCH DIPLOMATS, POLISARIO ATTACK FORCE CONSISTING OF ROUGHLY
200 TROOPS IN 40 LAND ROVERS INITIATED MORTAR BARRAGE AGAINST
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TICHIT AT 0730 HOURS ON MARCH 6. AFTER NEARLY TWO HOURS OF
SPORADIC SHELLING, POLISARIO UNITS BEGAN UTILIZING AUTOMATIC
WEAPONS AND, JUDGING FROM IRREGULARITY OF EXPLOSIONS, WHAT APP-
EARED TO BE ROCKET LAUNCHERS. RELATIVELY SMALL MAURITANIAN
MILITARY CONTINGENT IN TICHIT ATTEMPTED TO FORTIFY THEIR
DEFENSIVE POSITIONS, RETURNED SMALL ARMS FIRE WITH
WEAPONS AVAILABLE, AND TRANSMITTED MESSAGES TO NOUAK-

CHOTT FOR DISPATCH OF "DEFENDER" AIRCRAFT AND TO NEAR-BY TIDJIKDJA FOR REINFORCEMENT TROOPS. ENGAGEMENT EVENTUALLY TAPERED OFF IN LATE AFTERNOON LEAVING FIVE MAURITANIANS SEVERELY WOUNDED.

2. REINFORCEMENT UNITS FROM TIDJIKDJA AND DEFENDER AIRCRAFT FROM NOUAKCHOTT ARRIVED IN TICHIT DURING MORNING OF MARCH 7. DEFENDER IMMEDIATELY BEGAN AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE IN EFFORT TO DETERMINE LOCATIONS OF POLISARIO ELEMENTS, BUT ITS UTILITY WAS GREATLY IMPAIRED DUE TO LOCAL SANDSTORMS. TRACKS OF POLISARIO FORCE COULD NOT BE FOUND. AT SAME TIME GIRM LAND FORCES ATTEMPTED TO PURSUE POLISARIO ATTACK UNIT INTO DESERT. GIRM RESPONSE MISSION WAS SHARPLY ATTACKED WHEN POLISARIO SPRUNG AMBUSH WHICH COMPLETELY DISABLED FIRST FIVE LAND ROVERS IN GIRM PATROL COLUMN. DURING ENSUING FIGHTING, 20 MAURITANIANS ARE SAID TO HAVE BEEN EITHER KILLED OR CAPTURED. NEITHER CONTINUED AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE NOR SUBSEQUENT GROUND PATRY REGROUPED GIRM FORCES WERE SUCCESSFUL IN PINPOINTING LOCATION OF POLISARIO ATTACK FORCE, AND POLISARIO LOSSES OVER TWO-DAY PERIOD, IF ANY, ARE NOT KNOWN.

3. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH DIFFICULT TO PROVE, WE AND OTHER OBSERVERS OF LOCAL MILITARY SITUATION STRONGLY SUSPECT THAT POLISARIO FORCE WHICH ATTACKED TICHIT IS SAME, ALBEIT BEEFED-UP, FORCE WHICH STRUCK TIDJIKDJA ON FEBRUARY 3 (REFTEL). WE HAVE HEARD OF NO CONFIDENTIAL

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GIRM MILITARY SUCCESSES IN THAT REGION SINCE TIDJIKDJA ATTACK, AND SUSPECT THAT MAURITANIAN FORCES HAVE SIMPLY NOT BEEN ABLE TO LOCATE POLISARIO UNITS IN RUGGED TERRAIN OF EASTERN MAURITANIA. ARRIVAL OF SANDSTORM SEASON IN MAURITANIA HAS FURTHER COMPLICATED GIRM RECONNAISSANCE EFFORTS, GROUND AND AIR. DEFENDER AIRCRAFT, AS WAS THE CASE AT TICHIT, ARE NOT ABLE TO FLY LOW ENOUGH TO SPOT LOCATIONS OF POLISARIO UNITS. OUR AST ESTIMATE, THEREFORE, IS THAT SINCE AT LEAST FEBRUARY 3 SOME 200 POLISARIO TROOPS IN ROUGHLY 40 LAND ROVERS HAVE BEEN AND CONTINUE TO ROAM AROUND VIRTUALLY UNPOPULATED CENTRAL-EASTERN MAURITANIA WITHOUT GIRM FORCES HAVING ABILITY TO DO MUCH ABOUT IT.

HANDYSIDE

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